70 YEARS OF MARVEL COMICS
39
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X-FACTOR
THE FUTURE OF MUTANTKIND?
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IN A SOCIETY WHERE MUTANTS AND FORMER MUTANTS ALIKE FEEL THREATENED BY THE WORLD AROUND THEM, THEY TURN TO THEIR FIRST, BEST LINE OF DEFENSE WHENEVER TROUBLE ARISES: X-FACTOR, THE PRIVATE DETECTIVE AGENCY FOUNDED BY MADROX, THE MULTIPLE MAN.

X-FACTOR

WHAT HAPPENED LAST ISSUE: X-FACTOR RESCUED DARWIN FROM MR. MARU AND HIS OVERSEERS AT KARMA. THERESA WENT INTO LABOR. A FIREFIGHT BETWEEN RICTOR AND A GROUP OF FEDERAL AGENTS RESULTED IN RICOCHETING BULLETS STRIKING VAL COOPER.

WHAT HAPPENED BETWEEN ISSUES: X-FACTOR RETURNED TO THEIR HQ TO DISCOVER SIRYN GONE AND RICTOR UNDER ARREST. WHEREUPON IT WAS DISCOVERED THAT RICTOR'S GUN WAS ACTUALLY A PAINT GUN. INFORMED OF THIS, A BARELY-CONSCIOUS VAL COOPER ORDERED RICTOR'S RELEASE BEFORE BEING WHEELED INTO SURGERY, ALTHOUGH A CHARGE OF ASSAULT REMAINS PENDING. EVERYONE THEN WENT TO THE HOSPITAL TO AWAIT THE BIRTH. AND SURE, WE COULD HAVE DONE A WHOLE ISSUE ABOUT THAT, BUT WOULD YOU **REALLY** HAVE WANTED TO READ IT? DOESN'T THAT SOUND KIND OF BORING? DON'T YOU WANT TO GET STRAIGHT TO THE BABY? CUT TO THE CHASE, AS IT WERE? YEAH, WE THOUGHT SO.

AND NOW A PERSONAL PLEA FROM PETER DAVID:

AS SOON AS YOU FINISH THIS ISSUE, YOU'RE GOING TO WANT TO JUMP ONLINE AND TELL EVERYONE YOU KNOW ABOUT WHAT HAPPENS. GET USED TO THAT FEELING: YOU'LL FEEL THE SAME WAY FOR ISSUES 40 AND 41 AS WELL. PLEASE, OUT OF CONSIDERATION TO YOUR FELLOW FANS: RESIST THE URGE. SPEAK IN BROAD STROKES AS YOU WISH, BUT I'M BEGGING YOU, DO NOT GIVE A BLOW-BY-BLOW ACCOUNTING. DON'T EVEN PUT "SPOILER WARNINGS" AND THINK YOU'VE DONE DUE DILIGENCE, BECAUSE YOU SHOULDN'T BE PROVIDING THE TEMPTATION FOR OTHERS TO WRECK IT FOR THEMSELVES. EVERY READER DESERVES TO BE AS STUNNED AND SHOCKED AS YOU BY THE DEVELOPMENTS HEREIN. I AM ASKING YOU NOT TO RUIN IT FOR THEM.

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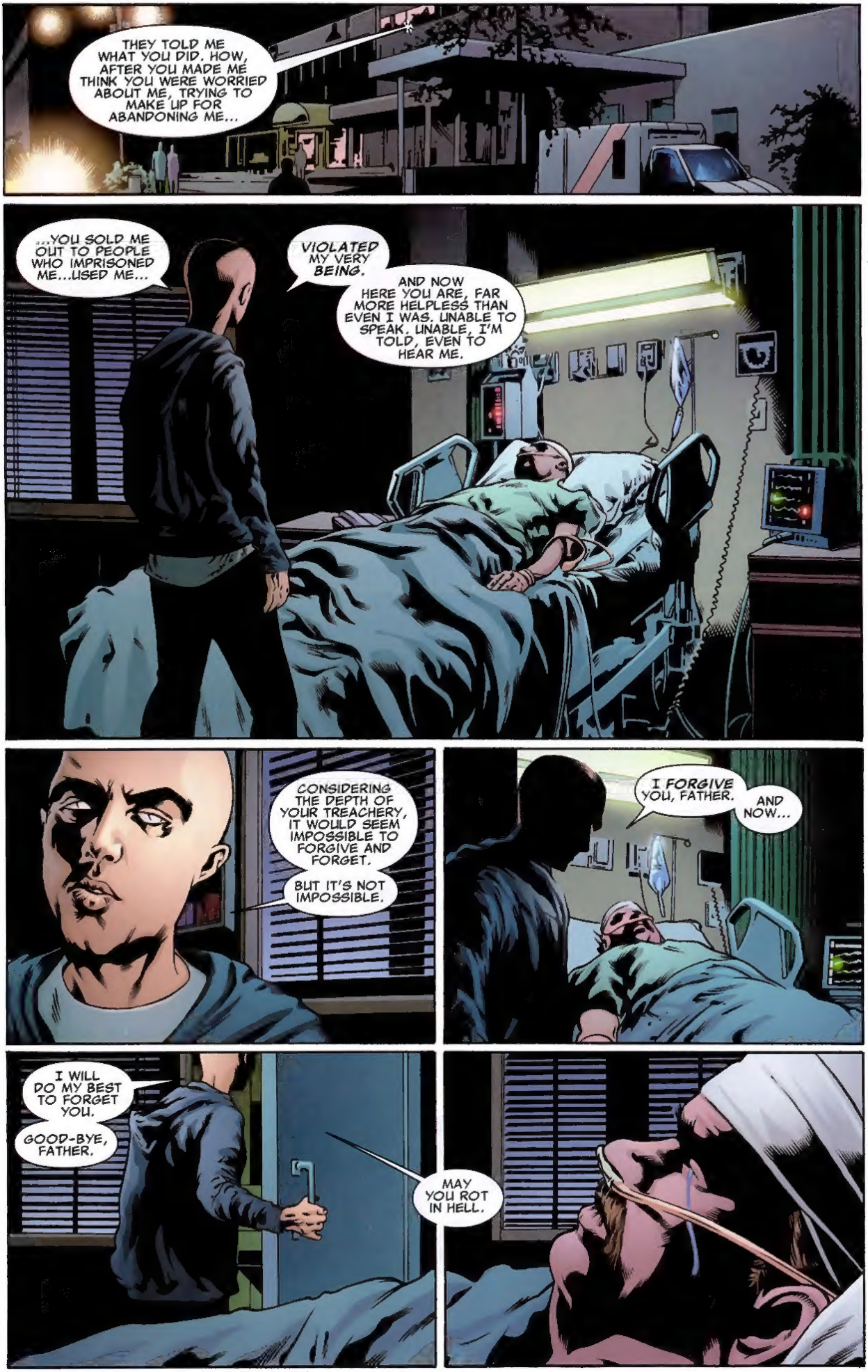
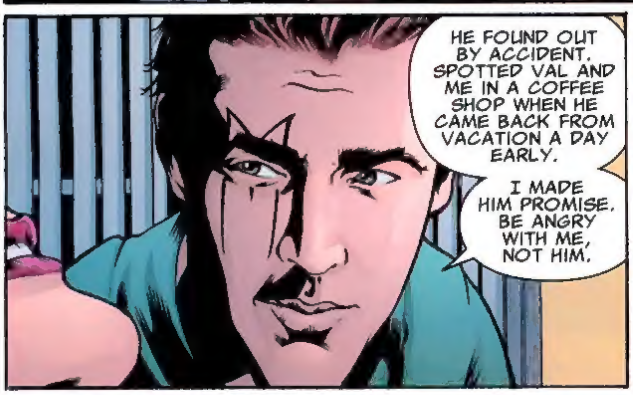
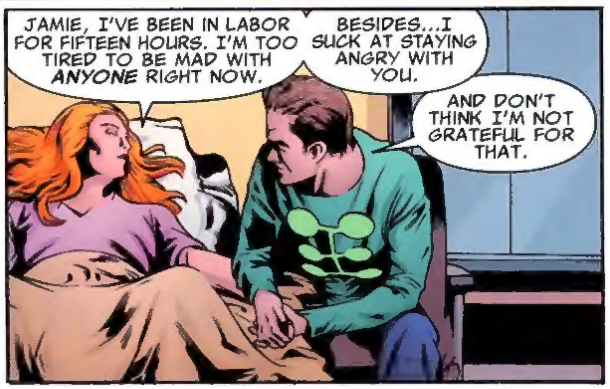
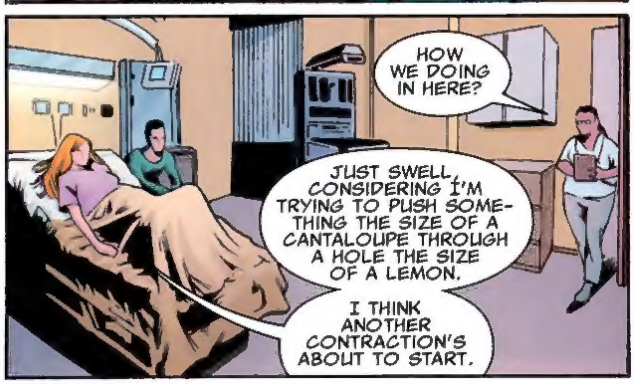
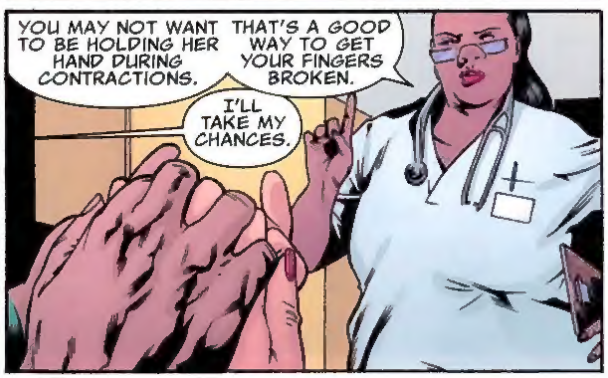

THEY TOLD ME WHAT YOU DID. HOW, AFTER YOU MADE ME THINK YOU WERE WORRIED ABOUT ME, TRYING TO MAKE UP FOR ABANDONING ME...
...YOU SOLD ME OUT TO PEOPLE WHO IMPRISONED ME...USED ME...
VIOLATED MY VERY BEING.
AND NOW HERE YOU ARE, FAR MORE HELPLESS THAN EVEN I WAS. UNABLE TO SPEAK. UNABLE, I'M TOLD, EVEN TO HEAR ME.
CONSIDERING THE DEPTH OF YOUR TREACHERY, IT WOULD SEEM IMPOSSIBLE TO FORGIVE AND FORGET.
BUT IT'S NOT IMPOSSIBLE.
I FORGIVE YOU, FATHER.
AND NOW...
I WILL DO MY BEST TO FORGET YOU.
GOOD-BYE, FATHER.
MAY YOU ROT IN HELL.

MULTIPLE BIRTH



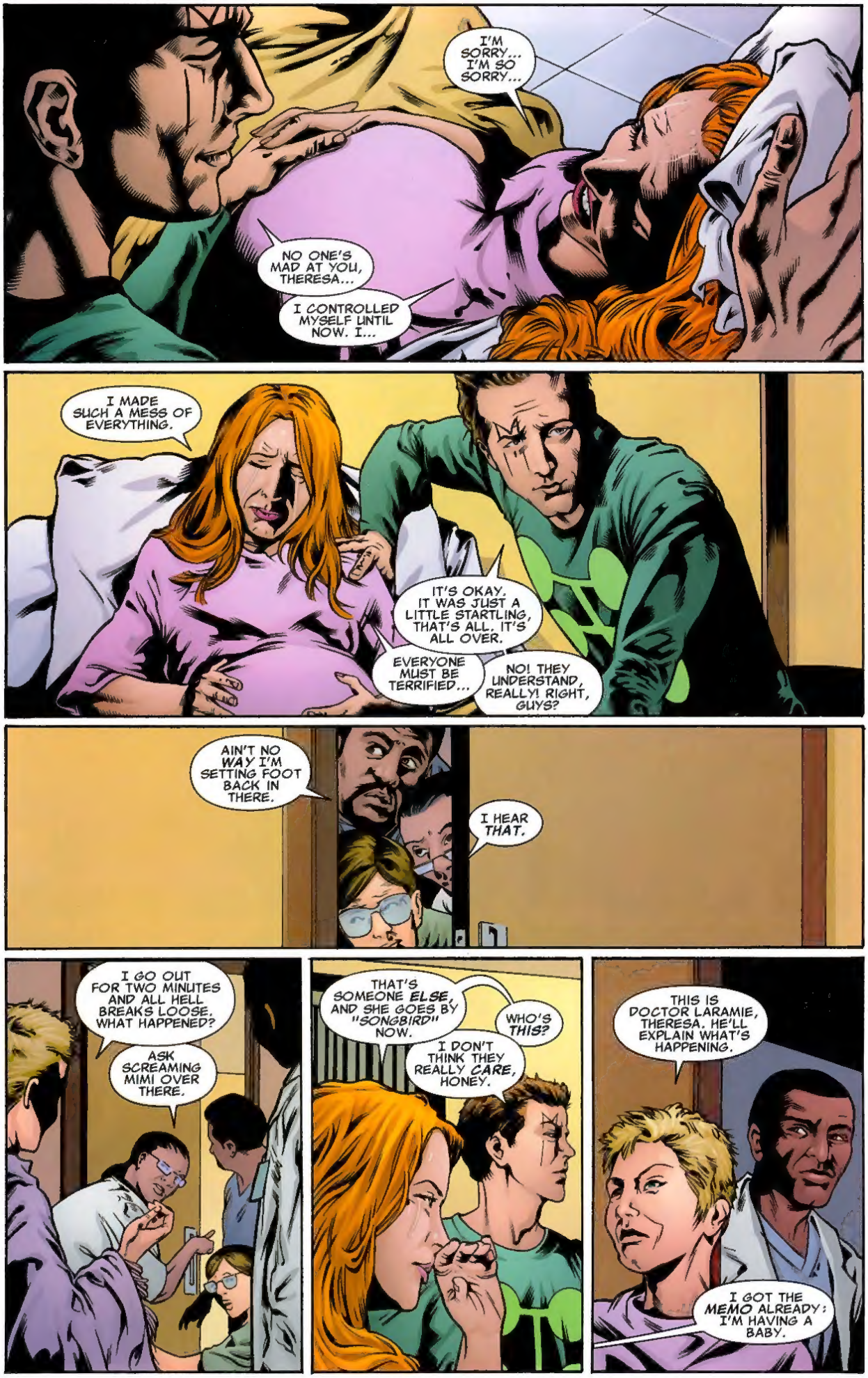






HOW LONG'S IT BEEN?
ABOUT THREE MINUTES LATER THAN THE LAST TIME YOU ASKED.
I'M SURE WE'LL HEAR SOMETHING BEFORE MUCH--
UH-OH.
WHAT'S WRONG--?
COVER YOUR EARS.
WHY SHOULD--?
COVER THEM! NOW! EVERYBODY! AND CLOSE YOUR EYES, AND HIT THE DECK!
EEEEEEEEEEE

EEEEEEEEEE
EEEEEEEEEE
EEEEEEE
WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT--?
N-NO CLUE. BUT AT LEAST IT STOPPED BEFORE THE WINDOW BRO--

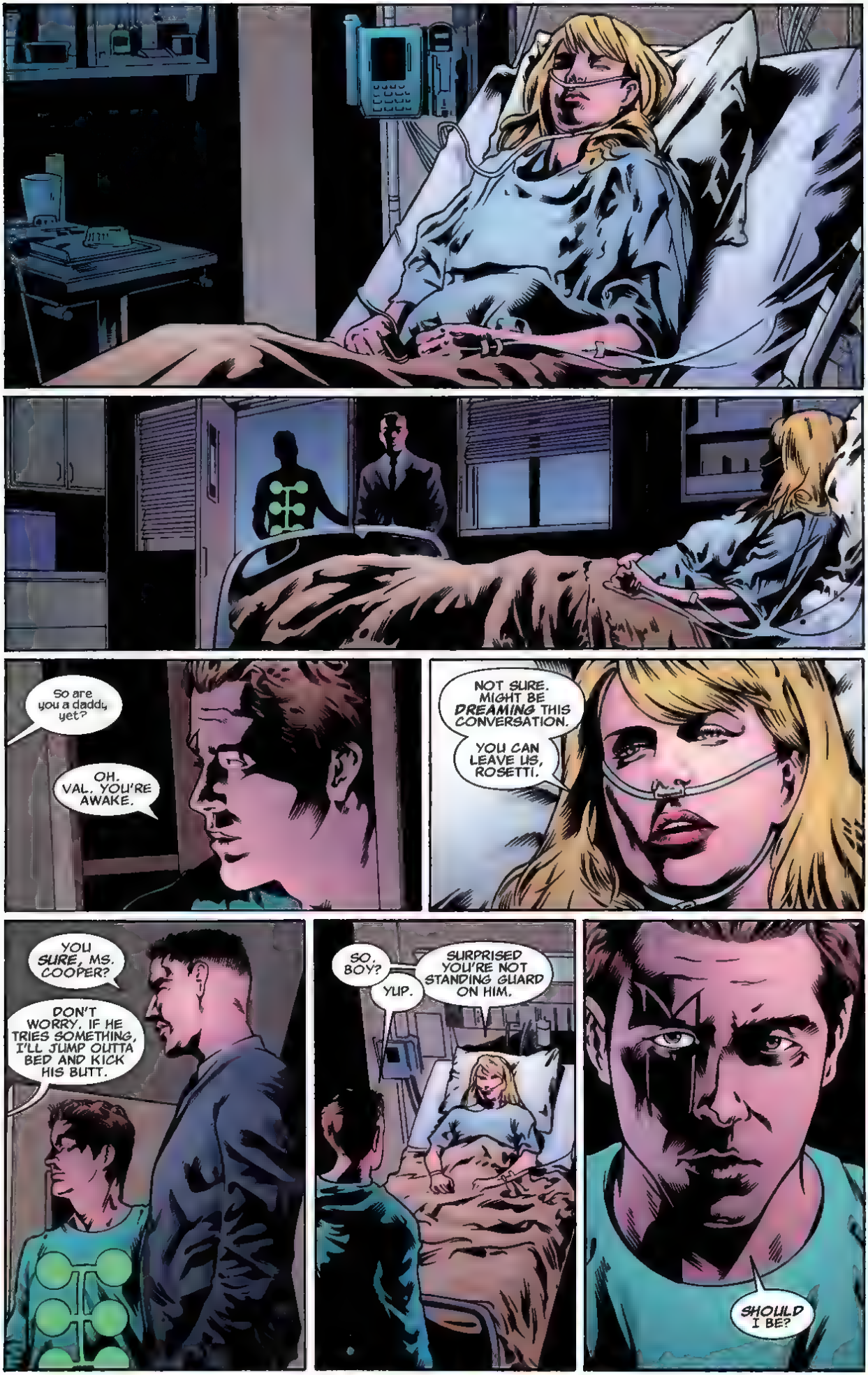

I'M SORRY... I'M SO SORRY...
NO ONE'S MAD AT YOU, THERESA...
I CONTROLLED MYSELF UNTIL NOW. I...
I MADE SUCH A MESS OF EVERYTHING.
IT'S OKAY. IT WAS JUST A LITTLE STARTLING, THAT'S ALL. IT'S ALL OVER.
EVERYONE MUST BE TERRIFIED...
NO! THEY UNDERSTAND, REALLY! RIGHT, GUYS?
AIN'T NO WAY I'M SETTING FOOT BACK IN THERE.
I HEAR THAT.
I GO OUT FOR TWO MINUTES AND ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE. WHAT HAPPENED?
ASK SCREAMING MIMI OVER THERE.
THAT'S SOMEONE ELSE, AND SHE GOES BY "SONGBIRD" NOW.
WHO'S THIS?
I DON'T THINK THEY REALLY CARE, HONEY.
THIS IS DOCTOR LARAMIE, THERESA. HE'LL EXPLAIN WHAT'S HAPPENING.
I GOT THE MEMO ALREADY: I'M HAVING A BABY.

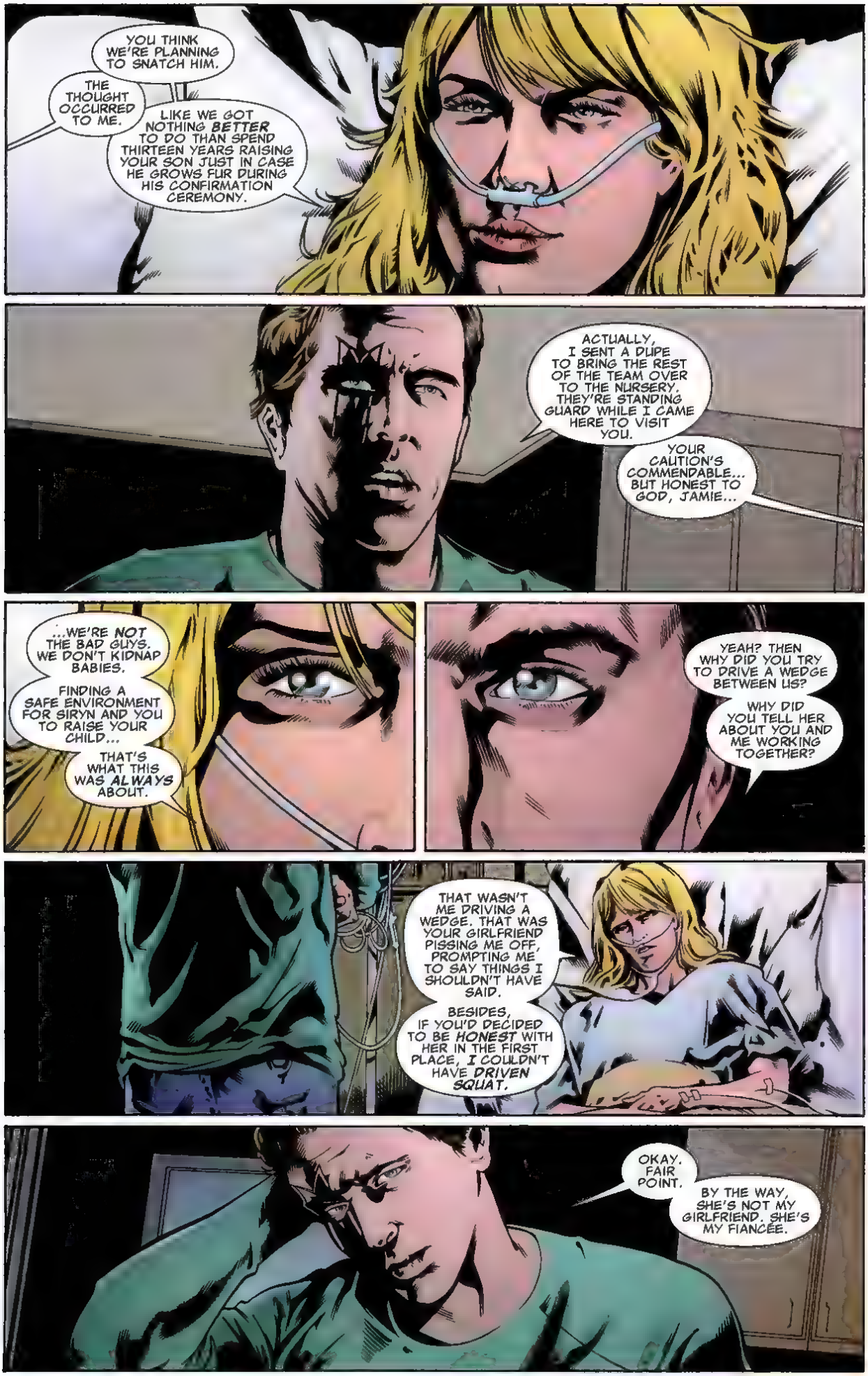
THERESA...I'M AFRAID THE BABY'S PRESENTING ABNORMALLY.
W-WHAT? YOU MEAN, LIKE...HE'S GOT WINGS, OR...?
A BREECH BIRTH, HONEY. THE DOCTOR'S SAYING YOU'LL NEED A C-SECTION.
THEY'RE GOING TO CUT ME OPEN...?
THEY'RE JUST GOING TO MAKE A TRANSVERSE CUT RIGHT ABOVE THE BLADDER. IT'LL BE FINE.
IN FACT, IT SOLVES THE PROBLEM OF YOUR SONIC SCREAM. IT WAS EITHER THIS OR NUMB YOUR VOCAL CORDS, WHICH I KNOW YOU HATE.
I...I GUESS. WHATEVER YOU SAY...
ARE YOU A DOCTOR, MR. MADROX?
ON AND OFF.
PREP O.R. 3, STAT.
IF IT GETS HER OUT OF HERE, IT'S FINE BY ME.
ARE YOU GOING TO BE THERE WITH ME?
ALL THE WAY.
LOOK...I WAS THINKING... AFTER THE BABY'S BORN AND EVERYTHING...
WANNA GET MARRIED?
I THOUGHT YOU'D NEVER ASK.

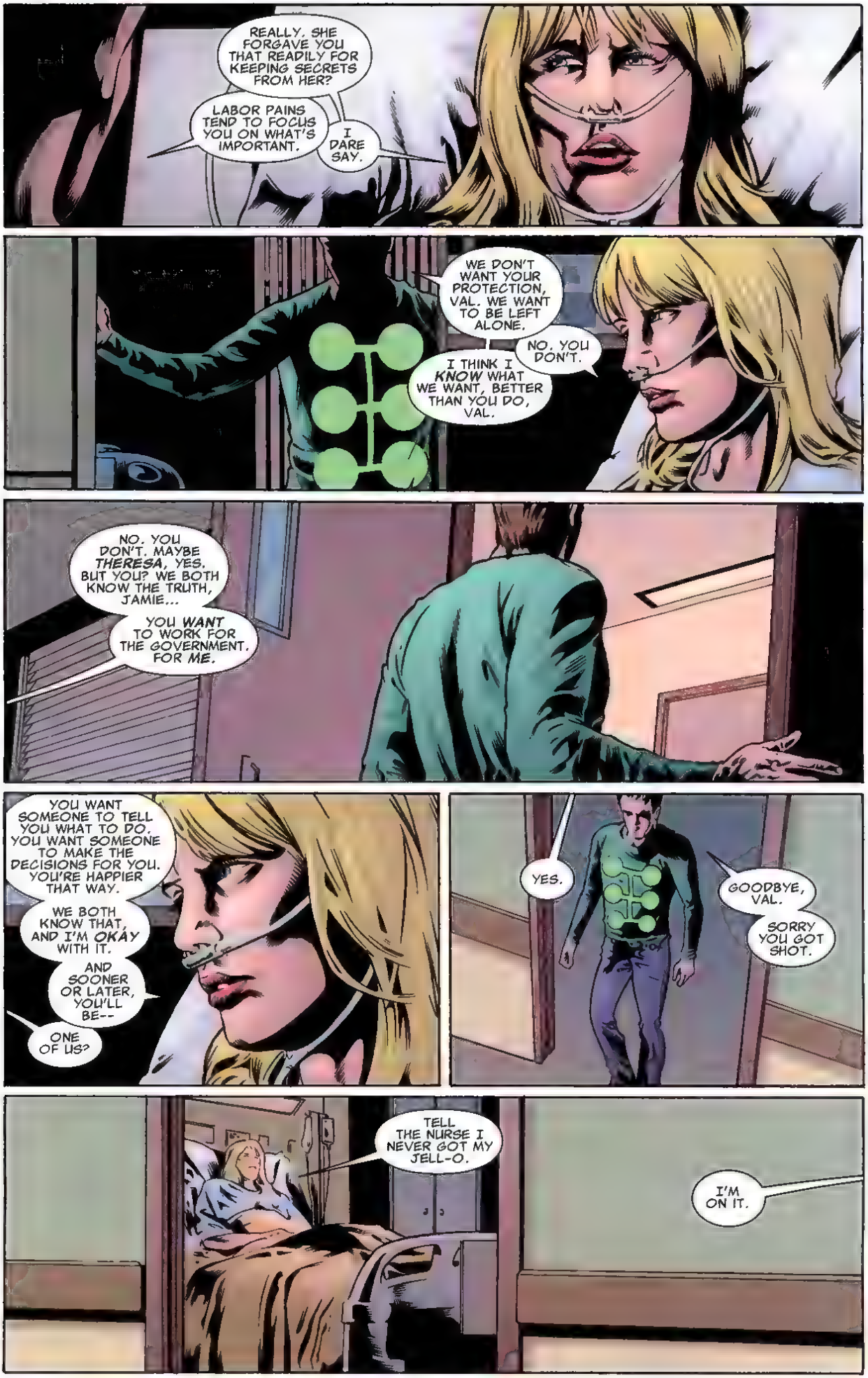
IT'S FUNNY. MY LIFE HAS BEEN MARKED BY AN INABILITY TO MAKE DECISIONS.
BUT WHEN TERRY ASKED ME TO MARRY HER, I DIDN'T HESITATE.
SO THAT'S WHAT IT FEELS LIKE, TO KNOW WITHOUT QUESTION THAT SOMETHING IS RIGHT.
I'D ALMOST FORGOTTEN.
I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS. BUT THIS MUCH I DO KNOW:
WHATEVER IT IS, THERESA'S GOING TO SHARE IT WITH ME.
I'M NOT KIDDING MYSELF. WE'RE GETTING MARRIED BECAUSE WE HAVE A CHILD TOGETHER.
THAT'S RARELY A RECIPE FOR SUCCESS.
BUT WHAT'S THE ALTERNATIVE? WE *DON'T* MARRY BECAUSE WE HAVE A CHILD? WHAT KIND OF BASS-ACKWARDS THINKING IS THAT?
WWAAAAAA

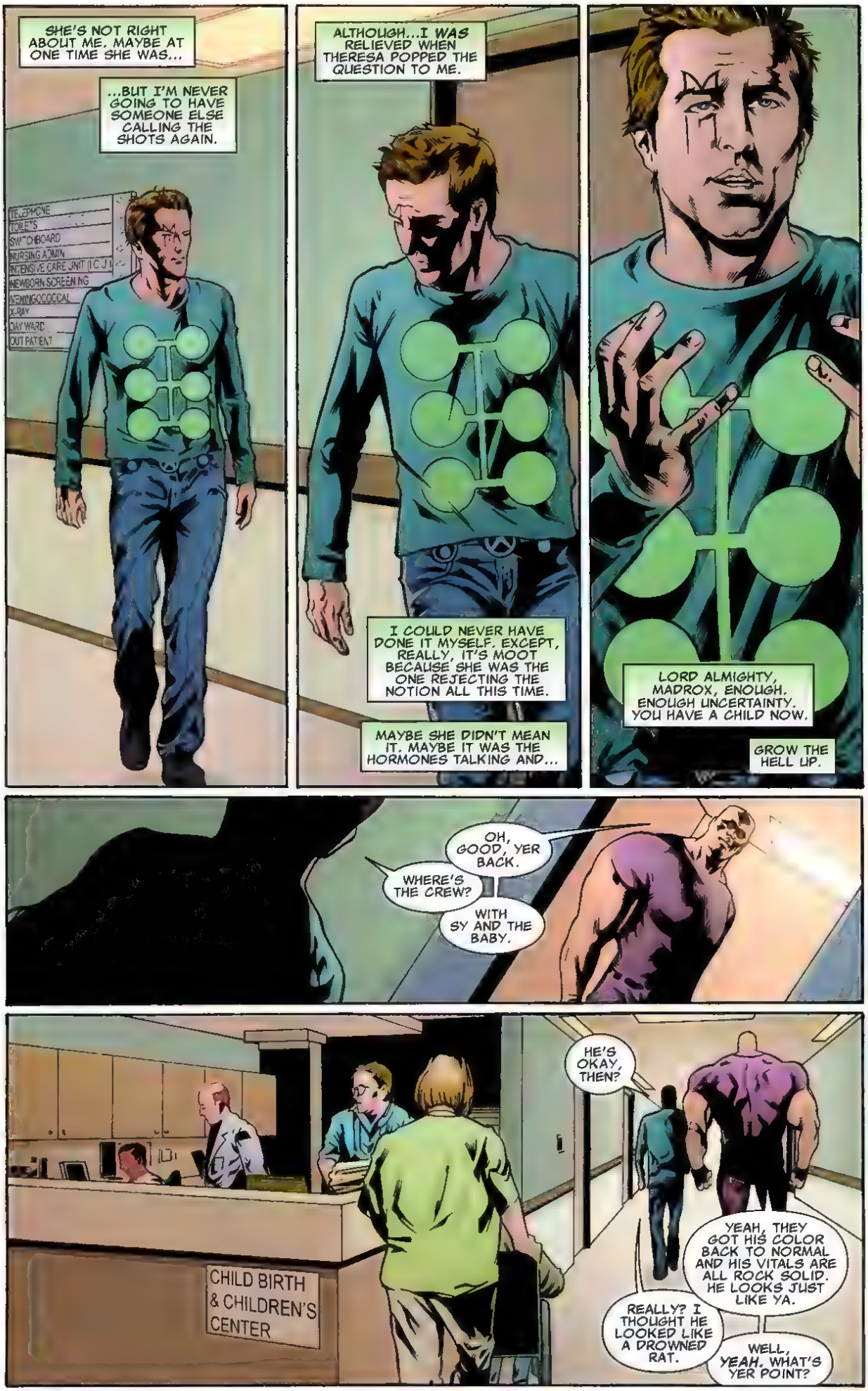
GET HIM TO THE NURSERY IMMEDIATELY.
WAAAAAA
WHAT IS IT? WHAT'S WRONG?
BABY'S SKIN IS A LITTLE BLUE. WE'RE GOING TO START HIM ON OXYGEN.
IT'S JUST A PRECAUTION. HE'S ALREADY SHOWN US HE'S GOT A HEALTHY SET OF LUNGS, SO--
GO WITH HIM. NOW. DON'T LET HIM OUT OF YOUR SIGHT.
WHAT?
GO! GO!
AND THEN I UNDERSTAND. EVEN AS I DO, I STAMP MY FOOT...
...AND LEAVE A DUPE BEHIND TO KEEP AN EYE ON SIRYN.
THE MOMENT SHOULD BE FILLED WITH JOY. INSTEAD IT'S RIFE WITH PARANOIA.
BUT PARANOIA DOESN'T MEAN THEY'RE NOT OUT TO GET US.

WE KNOW THE O*N*E IS INTERESTED IN OUR BABY.
WHAT IF THE BABY WAS NEVER BREECH? IF THIS WAS JUST A SCHEME TO SEPARATE US FROM--
MR. MADROX! SHOULDN'T YOU BE WITH YOUR WIFE?
IT'S OKAY. I'VE GOT IT COVERED.
YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO COME INTO THE NURSERY.
BUT I CAN KEEP AN EYE ON HIM THROUGH THE GLASS, RIGHT?
OF COURSE. WELL...THROUGH THE PLASTIC SHEET.
SHEET? WHAT HAPPENED TO THE--?
OH. RIGHT.
YOU, UH... YOU CAN PUT THE WINDOW ON OUR BILL.
IT'S ALREADY BEEN ADDED.
GREEAAAAT.
MY SON.


So are you a daddy yet?
OH. VAL. YOU'RE AWAKE.
NOT SURE. MIGHT BE DREAMING THIS CONVERSATION.
YOU CAN LEAVE US, ROSETTI.
YOU SURE, MS. COOPER?
DON'T WORRY. IF HE TRIES SOMETHING, I'LL JUMP OUTTA BED AND KICK HIS BUTT.
SO, BOY?
YUP.
SURPRISED YOU'RE NOT STANDING GUARD ON HIM.
SHOULD I BE?


YOU THINK WE'RE PLANNING TO SNATCH HIM.
THE THOUGHT OCCURRED TO ME.
LIKE WE GOT NOTHING BETTER TO DO THAN SPEND THIRTEEN YEARS RAISING YOUR SON JUST IN CASE HE GROWS FUR DURING HIS CONFIRMATION CEREMONY.
ACTUALLY, I SENT A DUPE TO BRING THE REST OF THE TEAM OVER TO THE NURSERY. THEY'RE STANDING GUARD WHILE I CAME HERE TO VISIT YOU.
YOUR CAUTION'S COMMENDABLE... BUT HONEST TO GOD, JAMIE...
...WE'RE NOT THE BAD GUYS. WE DON'T KIDNAP BABIES.
FINDING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT FOR SIRYN AND YOU TO RAISE YOUR CHILD...
THAT'S WHAT THIS WAS ALWAYS ABOUT.
YEAH? THEN WHY DID YOU TRY TO DRIVE A WEDGE BETWEEN US?
WHY DID YOU TELL HER ABOUT YOU AND ME WORKING TOGETHER?
THAT WASN'T ME DRIVING A WEDGE. THAT WAS YOUR GIRLFRIEND PISSING ME OFF, PROMPTING ME TO SAY THINGS I SHOULDN'T HAVE SAID.
BESIDES, IF YOU'D DECIDED TO BE HONEST WITH HER IN THE FIRST PLACE, I COULDN'T HAVE DRIVEN SQUAT.
OKAY. FAIR POINT.
BY THE WAY, SHE'S NOT MY GIRLFRIEND. SHE'S MY FIANCÉE.


REALLY. SHE FORGAVE YOU THAT READILY FOR KEEPING SECRETS FROM HER?
LABOR PAINS TEND TO FOCUS YOU ON WHAT'S IMPORTANT.
I DARE SAY.
WE DON'T WANT YOUR PROTECTION, VAL. WE WANT TO BE LEFT ALONE.
NO. YOU DON'T.
I THINK I *KNOW* WHAT WE WANT, BETTER THAN YOU DO, VAL.
NO. YOU DON'T. MAYBE *THERESA*, YES. BUT YOU? WE BOTH KNOW THE TRUTH, JAMIE...
YOU *WANT* TO WORK FOR THE GOVERNMENT. FOR *ME*.
YOU WANT SOMEONE TO TELL YOU WHAT TO DO. YOU WANT SOMEONE TO MAKE THE DECISIONS FOR YOU. YOU'RE HAPPIER THAT WAY.
WE BOTH KNOW THAT, AND I'M *OKAY* WITH IT.
AND SOONER OR LATER, YOU'LL BE--
ONE OF US?
YES.
GOODBYE, VAL.
SORRY YOU GOT SHOT.
TELL THE NURSE I NEVER GOT MY JELL-O.
I'M ON IT.

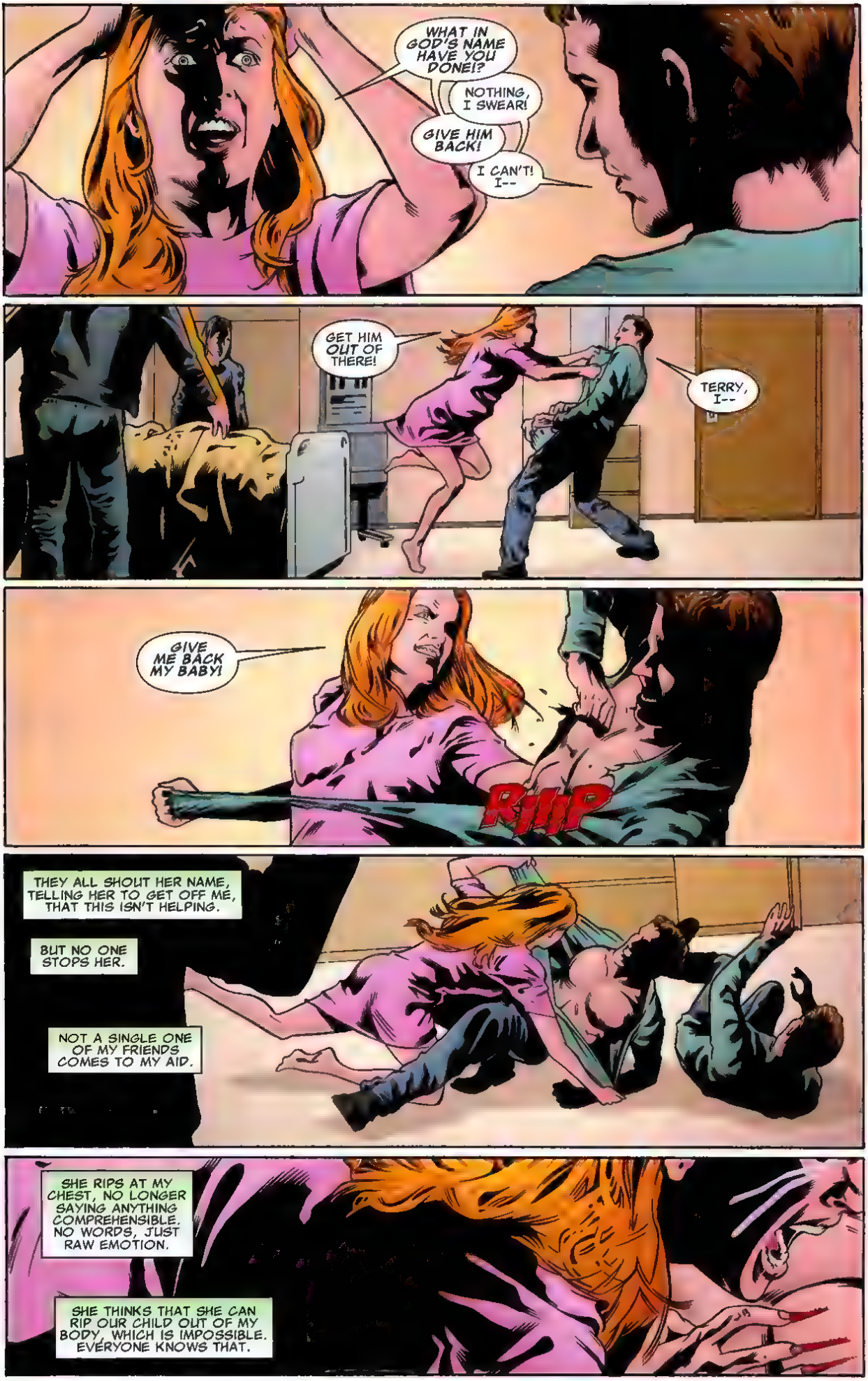

SHE'S NOT RIGHT ABOUT ME. MAYBE AT ONE TIME SHE WAS...
...BUT I'M NEVER GOING TO HAVE SOMEONE ELSE CALLING THE SHOTS AGAIN.
TELEPHONE
TOILETS
SWITCHBOARD
NURSING ADMIN
INTENSIVE CARE UNIT (I C U)
NEWBORN SCREENING
MENINGOCOCCAL
X-RAY
DAY WARD
OUT PATIENT
ALTHOUGH...I WAS RELIEVED WHEN THERESA POPPED THE QUESTION TO ME.
I COULD NEVER HAVE DONE IT MYSELF. EXCEPT, REALLY, IT'S MOOT BECAUSE SHE WAS THE ONE REJECTING THE NOTION ALL THIS TIME.
MAYBE SHE DIDN'T MEAN IT. MAYBE IT WAS THE HORMONES TALKING AND...
LORD ALMIGHTY, MADROX, ENOUGH. ENOUGH UNCERTAINTY. YOU HAVE A CHILD NOW.
GROW THE HELL UP.
OH, GOOD, YER BACK.
WHERE'S THE CREW?
WITH SY AND THE BABY.
CHILD BIRTH & CHILDREN'S CENTER
HE'S OKAY, THEN?
YEAH, THEY GOT HIS COLOR BACK TO NORMAL AND HIS VITALS ARE ALL ROCK SOLID. HE LOOKS JUST LIKE YA.
REALLY? I THOUGHT HE LOOKED LIKE A DROWNED RAT.
WELL, YEAH. WHAT'S YER POINT?

HEY, DADDY.
HEY, MOMMY.
WOW. THAT'S...GOING TO TAKE A LITTLE GETTING USED TO.
SO...OUR SON HAVE A NAME YET? YOU'D KINDA SOURED ON "NATHAN" AND SO WE'D NARROWED IT TO HALF A MILLION ALTERNA--
SEAN. I WANT TO CALL HIM SEAN, AFTER MY...
...MY FATHER...
...MY...
...MY LATE FATHER...
HE'S DEAD, ISN'T HE. HE'S DEAD AND HE'S NEVER COMING BACK.
THAT'S RIGHT, TERRY. AND HE DIED A HERO.
BUT HE DIED. THAT'S ALL THAT MATTERS TO ME.
BUT IT'S NOT ALL THAT WOULD HAVE MATTERED TO HIM. HOW HE DIED WOULD HAVE MATTERED.
AND HAVING HIS GRANDSON NAMED FOR HIM WOULD HAVE MATTERED.

YOU'RE RIGHT, MONET. I KNOW YOU ARE.
SAINTS, WHAT A GRIP HE'S GOT.
JAMIE? DON'T YOU WANT TO HOLD YOUR SON?
I DUNNO. I'LL PROBABLY DROP HIM...
YOU WON'T DROP HIM.
SEAN. IT'S A GOOD NAME. SEAN.
HE HAS THAT NEW BABY SMELL.
YEAH, I HEAR THEY SPRAY THAT ON IN THE FACTORY.
EVERYTHING THAT VAL SAID, ALL HER PREDICTIONS THAT I'LL COME CRAWLING BACK TO HER...
THEY FADE AWAY IN THE PURITY OF MY SON'S PRESENCE.
AND FOR THE SECOND TIME TODAY, I KNOW SOMETHING FOR ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN.
I KNOW THAT EVERYTHING IS GOING TO BE ALL RIGHT...
MADROX!
OH MY GOD!!!

OH MY HOLY GOD!

MY MIND GOES NUMB IN SHOCK.
I'M FROZEN, UNABLE TO MOVE...
I'M ABSORBING HIM. ABSORBING HIM LIKE ANY OF MY DUPES.
NO! NO, GIVE HIM BACK! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!?
SEAN!!!!
I...I CAN'T HELP IT! IT'S HAPPENING BY ITSELF! I--
SEAN!!!
MADROX, WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?!


WHAT IN GOD'S NAME HAVE YOU DONE!?
NOTHING, I SWEAR!
GIVE HIM BACK!
I CAN'T! I--
GET HIM OUT OF THERE!
TERRY, I--
GIVE ME BACK MY BABY!
RIIIP
THEY ALL SHOUT HER NAME, TELLING HER TO GET OFF ME, THAT THIS ISN'T HELPING.
BUT NO ONE STOPS HER.
NOT A SINGLE ONE OF MY FRIENDS COMES TO MY AID.
SHE RIPS AT MY CHEST, NO LONGER SAYING ANYTHING COMPREHENSIBLE. NO WORDS, JUST RAW EMOTION.
SHE THINKS THAT SHE CAN RIP OUR CHILD OUT OF MY BODY, WHICH IS IMPOSSIBLE. EVERYONE KNOWS THAT.

AND STILL NOBODY STOPS HER. MAYBE THEY'RE HOPING AGAINST HOPE THAT SHE SUCCEEDS.
OR MAYBE THEY JUST WANT TO SEE ME SUFFER.
AND WHY SHOULDN'T THEY? I DO.
I HOPE SHE RIPS YOUR DAMNED HEART OUT.
IT'S WHAT YOU DID TO HER, AND IT'S NO LESS THAN WHAT YOU DESERVED.
I DIDN'T MEAN TO--
SAVE IT FOR SOMEONE WHO CARES.
WHAT'S GOING ON IN--GOOD LORD!
WHERE'S THE BABY!
THERESA, HAVE YOU LOST YOUR MIND?!
HE TOOK HIM! MADROX TOOK HIM!
TOOK HIM WHERE? I DON'T UNDERST--
THERESA!!!
DAMMIT! SHE'S POPPED HER STITCHES.

THERESA, WE'VE GOT TO GET YOU BACK INTO THE O.R. BEFORE YOU START LOSING BLOOD BY THE QUART.
NO! NOT BEFORE HE--
UNHHHH...
TERRY!
ORDERLIES!
WHERE'S THE BABY? WHAT'S HAPPENED TO--
I ABSORBED HIM. HE...
HE WAS A DUPE, AN INFANT DUPE, AND I ABSORBED HIM--
--LIKE THIS.
SHE'D KNOWN GOING IN THAT WE WERE MUTANTS. WE CONFIDED IN HER BECAUSE WE FELT SHE SHOULD KNOW SINCE MUTANT BIRTHS CAN BE...UNPREDICTABLE.
BUT NO ONE COULD HAVE PREDICTED THIS.

EXCEPT... I SHOULD HAVE.
SHOULD HAVE REALIZED THE POSSIBILITY EXISTED.
IT'S ALL MY FAULT. ALL MY--

OH. HERE Y'ARE.

SHE'S OUTTA SURGERY.
HOW'S SHE DOING?
FLYING ON PAINKILLERS BUT OKAY OTHERWISE. SAID SHE WANTED TO SEE YOU.
I BET.

YOU CAN'T HIDE HERE FOREVER. SOONER OR LATER, YA GOTTA COME OUTTA THE--
UHM...
IT'S OKAY. I KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN.

HOW ARE THE OTHERS TAKING ALL THIS?
LONGSHOT AND DARWIN ARE CONFUSED, RICTOR'S QUIETLY SEETHING, AND MONET MOSTLY WANTS TO RIP OUT YOUR SPINE.
SO IT'S STATUS QUO.
PRETTY MUCH.

TERRY, I'M...I AM SO SORRY.
REMEMBER, I WAS PRETTY DRUNK THE NIGHT THE BABY WAS CONCEIVED, AND I WAS NEVER CLEAR ON WHAT HAPPENED. I THINK...
I THINK IT WAS A DUPE WHO FATHERED THE BABY. AND...AND APPARENTLY... THE OFFSPRING OF A DUPE ISN'T *REALLY* ANYTHING MORE THAN A--
I'm sorry.
TERRY, YOU DON'T HAVE ANYTHING TO APOLOGIZE FOR.
WHAT? I DON'T UNDERSTAN--
Yes. I do. For your finger.
KRAK
YARRRHH!!!
Next time I see you...
...it'll be your *neck.*

AVENGER
SCANS BY ZONE